

James E. Keenan

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I know not whether to express astonishment or amusement at the absurdities regarding John Kennedy as filtered through the silly revisionism expressed by R. Wilmer Witmer. Frankly, Mr. Witmer sounds like a very naive teen-ager.

This writer voted for John Kennedy, and would probably have done so again, but Mr. Witmer's description of the late president as "much like ... Jesus" is laughable. Kennedy's elastic personal morals - witness his liaison with Judith Campbell and the "exclusive" given a young woman reporter on a White House couch - would seem to be less than Christ-like, even though at the time his escapades were covered up by an adoring press.

Kennedy's even more elastic political morals were born in Boston gutter politics where the only rule was to win. As for his pacifism, the idea is silly. After his own gross errors contributed to the failure of the Bay of Pigs attack and his subsequent humiliation, both John Kennedy and his principal adviser, Robert Kennedy, determined to fight, anywhere, any time, what they saw as a monolithic, evil communism. Kennedy then began to escalate the Vietnam conflict. That situation had been inherited from the previous administrations, but

previous American involvement had been confined to sending military advisers. Kennedy sent the first organized military units (including his beloved Green Berets), a fact often ignored by the "Kennedy as pacifist" revisionists.

(In view of some recent theories, it is worth noting that both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Central Intelligence Agency vehemently opposed initial U.S. involvement in Vietnam, although they supported the political leadership after the decision had been made.)

The idea that the man who pledged to "fight any foe" was going to pull out of Vietnam is on a par with a claim that Bill Clinton will suddenly convert to conservatism and be baptized by Rush Limbaugh. Some former Kennedy associates have simply "gotten the religion" of political correctness. Some of the biggest boosters of American involvement in Vietnam at the time now claim to have been against the war; many readers will be able to fill in the names.

Robert Kennedy especially, fiercely protective of his brother, nurtured a deep hatred for Fidel Castro, whom he saw as a sneering, two-bit dictator who had twice humiliated John Kennedy and the United States - at the Bay of Pigs, and in the missile crisis. Part of the



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John F. Kennedy

secret bargain with the Soviet Union over the latter incident was an agreement that the U.S. would neither invade Cuba nor support any action against it; the Soviets stated bluntly that breaking the agreement would result in nuclear war.

Kennedys

So the Kennedys sought other ways to remove a man who had by then become a personal enemy and an obsession. To this end, they revived and expanded Eisenhower-era plans to assassinate the Cuban "Comandante en Jefe."

Castro easily learned of the new plots against him and felt that the Kennedys had broken the unwritten international rule against personal attacks on foreign leaders. He told an American reporter bluntly that if the assassination attempts continued, he would reply in kind.

Who, then, felt that turnabout was fair play? Who, then, was most eager to see John Kennedy out of the way? Who, then, was able to call on people who had shown devotion to communism and to the Cuban "socialist revolution"? Who, then, knew that he would be protected by the Soviet nuclear shield?

Shortly after the assassination of John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson told colleagues that Castro was behind the killing and that the government had ample evidence. If this were true, one asks, why not expose the plot and the master plotter? Simply because, in the tenor of the time (which revisionists like Mr. Witmer obviously did not live through), the American people - ignorant of both the Kennedy actions and the secret

agreement with the USSR - would have raised a demand for war against Cuba that no president could have withstood. And that would have meant World War III. Lyndon Johnson, not always a fount of wisdom, acted wisely that time and decided that the loss of a hundred million Americans would not bring Kennedy back. So the government kept quiet, kept its evidence from the Warren Commission, and allowed a thousand theories to grow.

And grow they did. American leftists, fearful that Castro or the Soviets might be involved, flung out a smokescreen of accusations. They were well matched in this match by rightists, but Castro was rarely mentioned and those who raised his name were pointedly ignored. There is not enough room here to even list all the organizations charged by some theorist or other with plotting or carrying out the Kennedy assassination, let alone to list the fatuous "evidence" against them. A few examples of accused "plotters" will suffice: the Boy Scouts, the Jesuits, Jacqueline Kennedy, the National Rifle Association (though Kennedy was a member), the KKK, Lyndon Johnson (remember "Macbird"?),

Bobby Kennedy, Aristotle Onassis, supporters of gun control, oil-rich Texans, the Teamsters Union, the

AFL-CIO, the Dallas police and, of course, those perennial favorites, the CIA, the FBI, the military, and the Mafia.

But why Robert Kennedy? Actually, although Castro hated him, Bobby was safe until it looked like he would become president. Castro could anticipate only more of "Operation Mongoose" and chose again to deal with the problem at its source.

On the general subject of "CIA as villain," one point needs to be made. The CIA has never launched any major covert operation except on the orders of, or at least the knowledge and consent of, the President of the United States. If an operation "blew up," the "rogue elephant" CIA took the heat; the president denied knowledge, as Eisenhower did after the U2 incident and Kennedy tried to do after the Bay of Pigs attack failed. (No, Mr. Witmer, not that U2; this one was an airplane, not a rock band.)

Forget Kennedy as a second Christ. And forget the silly conspiracy theories on the Kennedy assassinations. Only one man wanted the Kennedys out of the way. The Kennedys tried to kill Castro, but Castro got them first.

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